

WYCOMBE Wanderers pounded away at Sutton for most of Saturday's game and yet came away from Gander Green Lane with nothing to show for their efforts.

The reason for their sixth Rothmans Isthmian League defeat is simple — they couldn't put away their chances while Sutton took one of theirs and made it count. Territorially the Blues had much the better of the match but their failure to hit the back of the net meant a disappointing return for manager Ted Powell, a former Sutton player and manager. In fact the side that turned out for Sutton was virtually designed by Ted before he took over at Wycombe.

Defeat didn't taste quite so bitter, however, when the other Division One results were heard. Dagenham and Leatherhead lost while Hitchin were involved in the F.A. Trophy. This means Wanderers stay top but missed the chance to go further ahead. Now Hitchin are only five points behind with five games in hand (a possible 15 points).

The Blues were not helped by the absence of Howard Kettleborough and Tony Horseman, both injured, and

Sutton United 1, Wycombe Wanderers 0 REPORT BY STUART EARP

although Peter Cruse and Dylan Evans did well, the lack of a conventional target man reduced the power upfront.

Midfield dropped below their normal standard while the defence looked suspect for the first time in months. This was due to the pace and skills of Sutton's two front runners, Steve Cosham and Ricky Kidd. The latter scored two goals in Wanderers' 3-1 defeat in the corresponding game last season and neither Keith Mead nor Alan Phillips looked happy against him. It was fitting that Kidd should score the deciding goal — and a real beauty it was, too.

As a spectacle, the match must have pleased the fans for it was full of good football. Referee Ward seldom needed to intervene while the trainers were hardly required.

The abundance of goalmouth action started in the first minute when Sutton won a corner. John Rains, United's best player in defence, powered in a header that John Maskell grabbed beneath the crossbar. Wanderers replied with two corners of their

own and went on to record 17 against Sutton's four — a pretty good reflection of the pressure.

'BIG BOOT'

Wycombe were combining well early on while the defence looked cool when playing the ball away and in contrast to Sutton's 'big boot' tactics especially from the aptly named Steve Bangs, the Blues defence used skilful one touch football to relieve any danger.

Cosham showed just why he has 19 goals to his name this season in the 15th minute. Despite being shadowed by three defenders he turned and found room for a shot that sent Maskell diving to parry the ball. Wycombe replied quickly when goalkeeper Rick Collier dropped Ian Pearson's corner and Phillips sent in an overhead kick which landed on the top of the net.

Cruse saw his header cleared off the line by Mick Powell and soon afterwards Mick Holifield had half a chance at the far post but took too long. At this stage, Wycombe's front men looked dangerous with their fast raids but Sutton hit back

with a fierce burst of attacks that eventually brought the goal.

After 37 minutes Kidd latched onto Collier's long goalkick and thundered in a first time shot that Maskell brilliantly tipped over the top. From the corner Cosham beat two players and crossed where Kidd met the ball and rattled a shot against the crossbar.

SUPERB GOAL

The pressure told in the 40th minute with a move that was almost a carbon copy of Kidd's previous effort. This time Cosham headed on Collier's goalkick and Kidd crashed a first time shot past the stranded Maskell from 15 yards. It was a superb goal and one that any side would have conceded.

So Wanderers went in a goal down at half-time and after the resumption, they proceeded to dominate the second half. They created a string of chances but Sutton's defence rode their luck while the Blues must have known it just wasn't their day.

In the 54th minute Pearson set up Kennedy with a shooting chance which beat Collier but hit the outside of a post. Then the goalkeeper got himself into all sorts of trouble. Rolling the ball before a goalkick, he was robbed by Evans who had a couple of seconds to shoot into an empty net. He tried to tee the ball up on his right foot but by that time the goalkeeper was back to save.

Collier made amends by tipping Mead's delicate chip over the crossbar in the 58th minute and a six corner period of pressure ended when Paul Birdseye overlapped onto Pearson's pass but drove the ball inches past the far post.

OFFSIDE

Then in the 65th minute Pearson headed home what looked like an equaliser but the linesman had flagged for an off-side decision. At this time the pressure was constant and although Roger Steer troubled Maskell with one shot, most of the action was at the other end.

Best chance of all fell to Mead with 15 minutes left. A Sutton defender headed a corner towards his own net with the defence pushing out. Mead was left in yards of space with only the goalkeeper to beat from eight yards. But his shot was taken by Collier falling to his right. Soon afterwards Alan Davies, substitute for Kennedy, headed over from five yards.

Wanderers will be kicking themselves for not salvaging a point from this game at least.

SUTTON: R. Collier; M. Powell, S. Bangs, J. Rains, A. Cook; T. Bladon, L. Pritchard, R. Steer; S. Ibbitson, S. Cosham, R. Kidd. Sub. L. Wallis (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies; H. Kennedy (sub. A. Davies 73 mins.), J. Priestley, M. Holifield; P. Cruse, D. Evans, I. Pearson.

Referee: A. Ward (Southgate).
Half-time: 1-0. **Goalscorer:** Kidd (Sutton) 40.



ABOVE: JOHN RAINS AND JOHN MASKELL
JUMP FOR A HEAD BALL